



California Assessment of  
Student Performance and Progress

Grades  
6 • 7 • 8

# Teacher Guide

## to the Smarter Balanced Assessments

### *English Language Arts/Literacy*



California Department of Education



### **Acknowledgments**

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## Introduction

The purpose of the Teacher Guide is to deepen teachers' understanding of the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments, their alignment with the California Common Core State Standards (CA CCSS), and their intended connection to classroom learning. The guide for English language arts/literacy (ELA) is grade-span specific and synthesizes key information from a wide array of resources and resource sites, including:

- California Common Core State Standards
- *California English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework (ELA/ELD Framework)*
- Content, item, task, and stimulus specifications
- Smarter Balanced Test Blueprints
- Smarter Balanced Practice Test Scoring Guides
- Smarter Balanced Communication Tools
- Smarter Balanced Digital Library

The ELA guides are organized by grade span to highlight the changes in expectations as students move through the grade levels. They explain how student skills and knowledge are assessed and reported through collecting and scoring evidence. It also provides examples of the range and types of items that appear on the assessments and the multiple resources that are available to teachers, students, and parents to “de-mystify” the assessments.

The Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments are part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) System.

The new Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments are different from the previous tests included in the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program in several ways including:

- Designed to measure the expectations embodied in the CA CCSS adopted by the California State Board of Education in August 2010

- Emphasize deeper knowledge of core concepts and ideas within and across the disciplines along with analysis, synthesis, problem solving, communication, and critical thinking
- Include a greater variety of item types
- Capitalize on the strengths of computer adaptive testing (CAT), such as efficient and precise measurement across the full range of achievement
- Provide greater opportunities for classroom teachers to influence the design and operation of the assessment system

## Section One: Purpose of the Guide—Resource for Planning Learning Events to Implement the English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools for Kindergarten through Grade Twelve Public Schools

These Teacher Guides are intended to be a resource for classroom teachers as they plan learning activities that fully implement the California *ELA/ELD Framework* using assessment feedback from the Smarter Balanced system of assessments.

**Figure 1. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Feedback Loop**

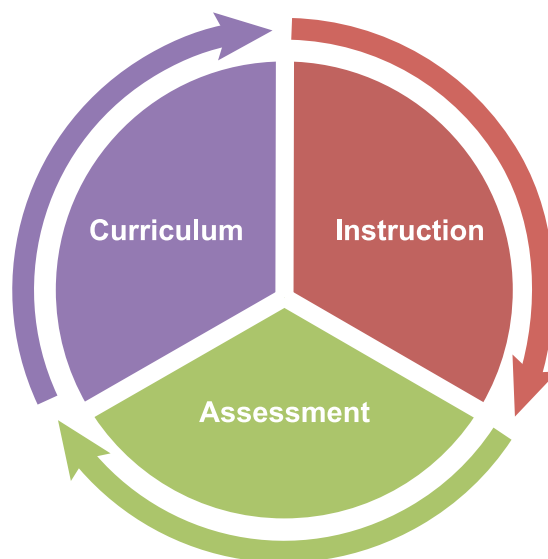


Figure 1 shows the continuous feedback loop between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Teachers use curriculum to plan instruction and use evidence from a variety of assessments to determine next steps in the teaching and learning cycle. The *ELA/ELD Framework* not only describes the state standards and research-based practices that support the standards, but connects overarching themes and the instructional shifts in the standards. Smarter Balanced assessment developers used similar overarching themes, instructional shifts, and understanding of the CA CCSS to build a fair and accurate assessment of the standards. They developed performance tasks and innovative items not seen before on large-scale state assessments to meet the demands of the key themes and the 21st century learning described below. The *ELA/ELD Framework* and Smarter Balanced assessments can function together to provide accurate and consistent evidence of learning around the feedback loop.

## English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve

The first stop for teachers in planning learning events is the *ELA/ELD Framework*. The guidance in this resource is research-based and includes practical examples to help all teachers.

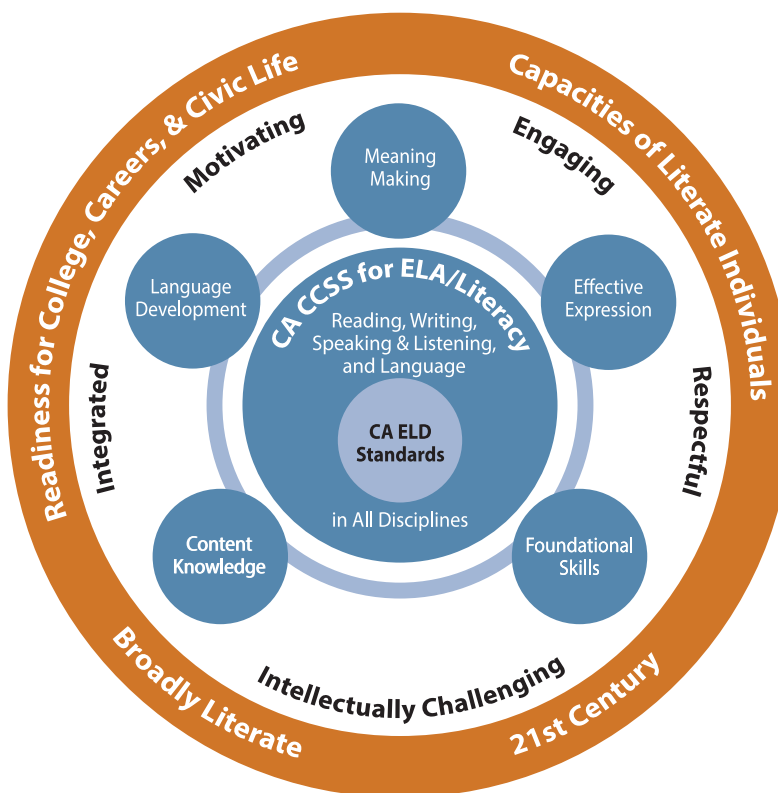
### Principles and Beliefs Behind the Development of the *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (2015):

- Schooling should help all students achieve their highest potential.
- The responsibility for learners' literacy and language development is shared.
- ELA and English language development (ELD) curricula should be well designed, comprehensive, and integrated.
- Effective teaching is essential to student success.
- Motivation and engagement play crucial roles in learning.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Executive Summary (September 2015) • *California English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, page 2



Figure 2. Circles of Implementation of ELA and ELD Instruction



## Key Themes of English Language Arts/Literacy and English Language Development Instruction

*Instruction focuses on...*

### Meaning Making

Meaning making is at the heart of ELA and ELD instruction. It is the central purpose for interacting with text, producing text, engaging in research, participating in discussion,

and giving presentations.

It is the reason for learning the foundational skills and for expanding language.

Meaning making includes literal understanding but is not confined to it at any grade or with any student. Inference making

### The Smarter Connection

Smarter Balanced reading and listening assessments use source materials that meet grade-level requirements for text complexity. Students identify evidence to support each answer to show how the student has made meaning from grade-level text.

and critical reading, writing, and listening are given substantial and explicit attention in every discipline. Among the contributors to meaning making are language, knowledge, motivation, and in the case of reading and writing, the ability to recognize printed words and use the alphabetic code to express ideas.

## Language Development

Language is the cornerstone of literacy and learning. It is with and through language that students learn, think, and express information, ideas, perspectives, and questions. The strands of the CA CCSS for ELA—Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Research and Inquiry—all have language at the core, as do the parts of the California ELD Standards—Interacting in Meaningful Ways, Learning about How English Works, and Using Foundational Literacy Skills.

Students enrich their language as they read, write, speak, and listen and as they interact with one another and learn about language. The foundational skills provide access to written language.

### The Smarter Connection

Smarter Balanced test questions allow students to show that they know the nuances of language. Questions with more difficult language and inferences may result in higher score values. Writing with more sophisticated language is highly valued as well.

## Effective Expression

Each strand of the CA CCSS for ELA and each part of the California ELD Standards includes attention to effective expression. Students learn to examine the author's craft as they read, analyzing how authors use language, text structure, and images to convey information, influence their readers, and evoke responses. Students learn to

### The Smarter Connection

Smarter Balanced reading and writing tests use different types of questions to assess the ability of students to recognize the choices made by the author in the structure and style of a piece of writing or in a comparison of two pieces of writing. Students show their grasp of grade-level conventions, both on the computer adaptive test questions and on the performance assessment task essay.

effectively express themselves as writers, discussion partners, and presenters and they use digital media and visual displays to enhance their expression. They gain command over the conventions of written and spoken English, and they learn to communicate in ways appropriate for the context and task.

## Content Knowledge

Content knowledge is a powerful contributor to comprehension of text and has a

### The Smarter Connection

Informational text resources are source documents in the performance assessment tasks that test the ability of students to read new material and comprehend it. Students use the source documents to evaluate the quality and reliability of the information, and the claims of the authors. Using this information, students respond to a writing assignment that could be narrative, explanatory/ informational, or opinion/ argument. The writing is evaluated using rubrics for organization/purpose, elaboration/evidence, and conventions.

powerful reciprocal relationship with the development of literacy and language. It also supports the ability to write effective opinions/arguments, narratives, and explanatory/informational text; engage in meaningful discussions; and present ideas and information to others. It contributes significantly to language development, and it is fundamental to learning about how English works. Both sets of standards, ELA and ELD, ensure

that students can learn from informational texts and can share their knowledge as writers and speakers.

## Foundational Skills

Acquisition of the foundational skills (print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency)

enables students to independently read and use written language to learn about the world and themselves; experience extraordinary and diverse works of literary fiction and nonfiction; and share their knowledge, ideas, stories, and perspectives with others. Students who know how to decode and develop

### The Smarter Connection

The student uses foundational skills to decode grade-level text and understand the meaning of the question, key inferences, and recognizes the evidence required to answer correctly. The Smarter Balanced computer adaptive testing engine uses the answers of the student to find the appropriate level of difficulty for the student to answer the questions. For every claim assessed on the test, questions are available that are very easy, easy, medium, hard, and very hard. Students who are able to correctly answer more difficult questions move up the difficulty scale more quickly. Students who answer incorrectly are given easier questions and move down the difficulty scale to accommodate their learning. Strong foundational skills make a critical difference in building student confidence to answer challenging questions.

automaticity with an increasing number of words are best positioned to make significant strides in meaning making, language development, effective expression, and content knowledge. At the same time, attention to those themes provides the very reason for learning about the alphabetic code and propels progress in the foundational skills. (See the *Resource Guide to the Foundational Skills of the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* Located on the CDE’s Curriculum Frameworks Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/cf/2> under the Implementation Support tab.

### Learning in the 21st Century

Skills for living and learning in the 21st century are inextricably linked with achievement of the ELA and ELD standards. Among these skills are the four “C’s” (critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, and collaboration skills), social and cross-cultural skills and global competence, and technology skills.

<sup>2</sup> Executive Summary (September 2015), ELA/ELD Framework for California Public Schools, K–12, page 5

**Students develop****when they...**

## Critical thinking

- examine text closely to interpret information, draw conclusions, and evaluate an author's decisions about content and form
- identify an author's perspectives, biases, and use of rhetoric

## Creative thinking

- develop dramatic, poetic, media, and visual responses to text
- create presentations to share understandings of text

## Communication and collaboration skills

- interact in meaningful ways with peers of diverse backgrounds and discuss different and similar perspectives on issues
- plan and organize collaborative presentations

## Social and cross-cultural skills and global competence

- engage with literature that presents a range of world perspectives and experiences
- capitalize on proficiency in languages other than English to communicate with global peers

## Technology skills

- engage with digital and multimedia text
- use a variety of technologies to share information from or responses to texts or to learn more about a topic or author<sup>3</sup>

The *ELA/ELD Framework* guidance is important to keep in mind when planning learning activities. Students who make meaning, develop language, and use effective expression

**The Smarter Connection**

Smarter Balanced performance assessment tasks were designed to meet the requirements of 21st century learning. The topics are real-world examples of issues that engage students. The performance tasks (PTs) are designed to elicit evidence of critical thinking, creative thinking, and consideration of the local and global impact of the issues. The PTs use technology tools to facilitate communication and creative student expression.

through writing and speaking are able to demonstrate their deep content knowledge and foundational skills. Daily opportunities to engage in rich learning using 21st century skills keep students engaged and develop students as partners in their own learning.

<sup>3</sup> Executive Summary (September 2015), *ELA/ELD Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, page 28

## Section Two: Understanding and Using Smarter Balanced Test Design Principles to Support Classroom Learning Events

This section describes the evidence-centered design of the Smarter Balanced assessments and the hierarchical approach to item development. There are examples of how the test developers and teachers use evidence to accurately assess the learning required by the CA CCSS. Connecting the use of evidence-centered design and classroom learning activities allows a strong connection between Smarter Balanced results and resources.

### Understanding the Fundamentals of Smarter Balanced Design

Knowing how the Smarter Balanced assessment system is developed, particularly how items are developed, can be helpful in understanding how to make the best use of the assessment resources and results. This knowledge should facilitate increasing the intentional connection between curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The diagram and charts on the following pages describe the structure of Smarter Balanced item specifications—how evidence-centered design is used to develop items. An ELA, grade four example is used here. While it is certainly not necessary to memorize this information, having a working knowledge of item development can facilitate use of results to enhance learning events. This item specification information is available for all Smarter Balanced assessments in resources listed at the end of this document.

To illustrate the importance of evidence-centered design, Figure 3 displays the relationship among the overall claims, sub-domain assessment claims, assessment targets, and academic standards. This relationship is important, not only in the design and development of Smarter Balanced items, but also in the interpretation and reporting of scores, as well as the development of the achievement level descriptors.

#### The Smarter Connection

The Smarter Balanced evidence-centered design clearly establishes the relationship among the content domain, assessment claims, assessment targets and academic content standards.

This claim/target/standard relationship is clearly articulated through the steps of the evidence-centered design model that Smarter Balanced assessments employ. The first step in the evidence-centered



design approach is to define the content domains to be measured; in this case, the domains are English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The next step is to define the assessment claims that will be made about the domains. Claims are arguments derived from evidence about college and career readiness; Smarter Balanced claims are statements about what a student knows and is able to do. In the Smarter Balanced system, there are two kinds of claims: an “overall claim,” corresponding to performance on the entire assessment of English language arts/literacy or mathematics, and four domain-specific claims corresponding to performance in different areas in each of the assessments.

After carefully analyzing the CCSS and thinking about what students must know and be able to do in order to be prepared for college and career paths, Smarter Balanced identified four claims specific to English language arts and four claims specific to mathematics that focus on what students are expected to be able to do at each grade level.

Once the domains are defined and the claims are identified, the third step is to clearly identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that form the content domain. In the Smarter Balanced system, the KSAs that are intended to be measured are called “assessment targets.” An assessment target defines the specific KSAs that students should be able to demonstrate within the domain. A large number of assessment targets are measured in the Smarter Balanced assessment system.

Once assessment targets are defined, the fourth step focuses on identifying the types of information that need to be collected from students to allow meaningful information to be gleaned about the student’s achievement of the assessment targets. The information Smarter Balanced elicits from students is considered to be evidence that can support or refute a claim about the student’s achievement of the assessment target.

Once the types of evidence to collect are determined, the final step focuses on developing items or tasks that will elicit the evidence regarding the knowledge, skills, and/or abilities that are articulated in the standards.

**Figure 3. Relationship Among Overall Claims, Sub-Domain Assessment Claims, Assessment Targets and Standards**

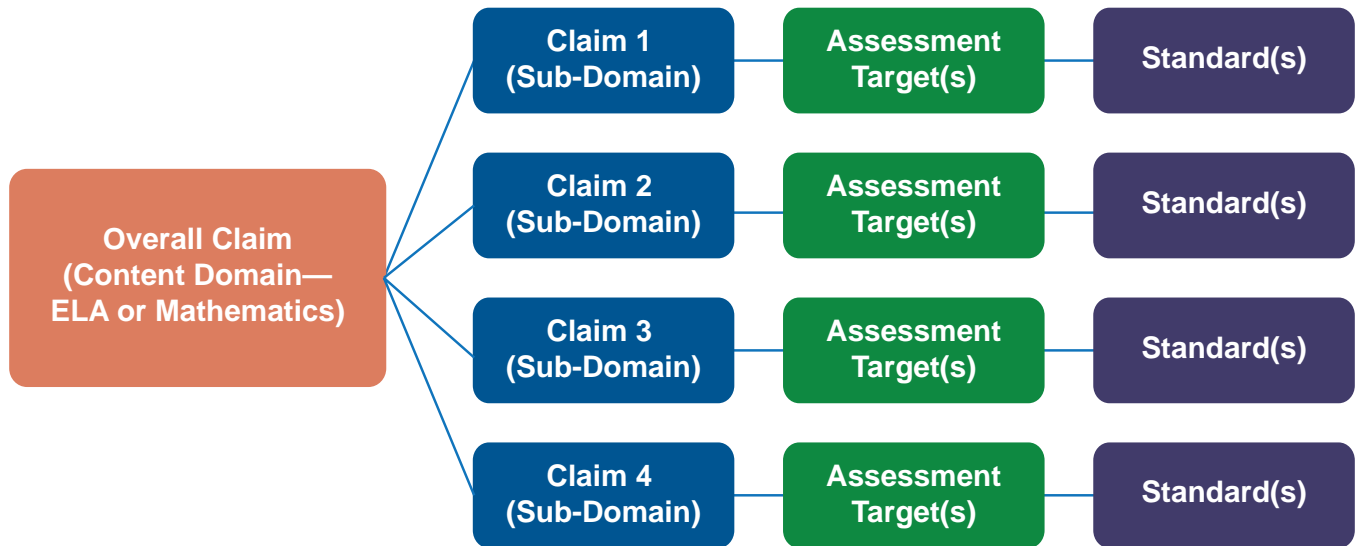
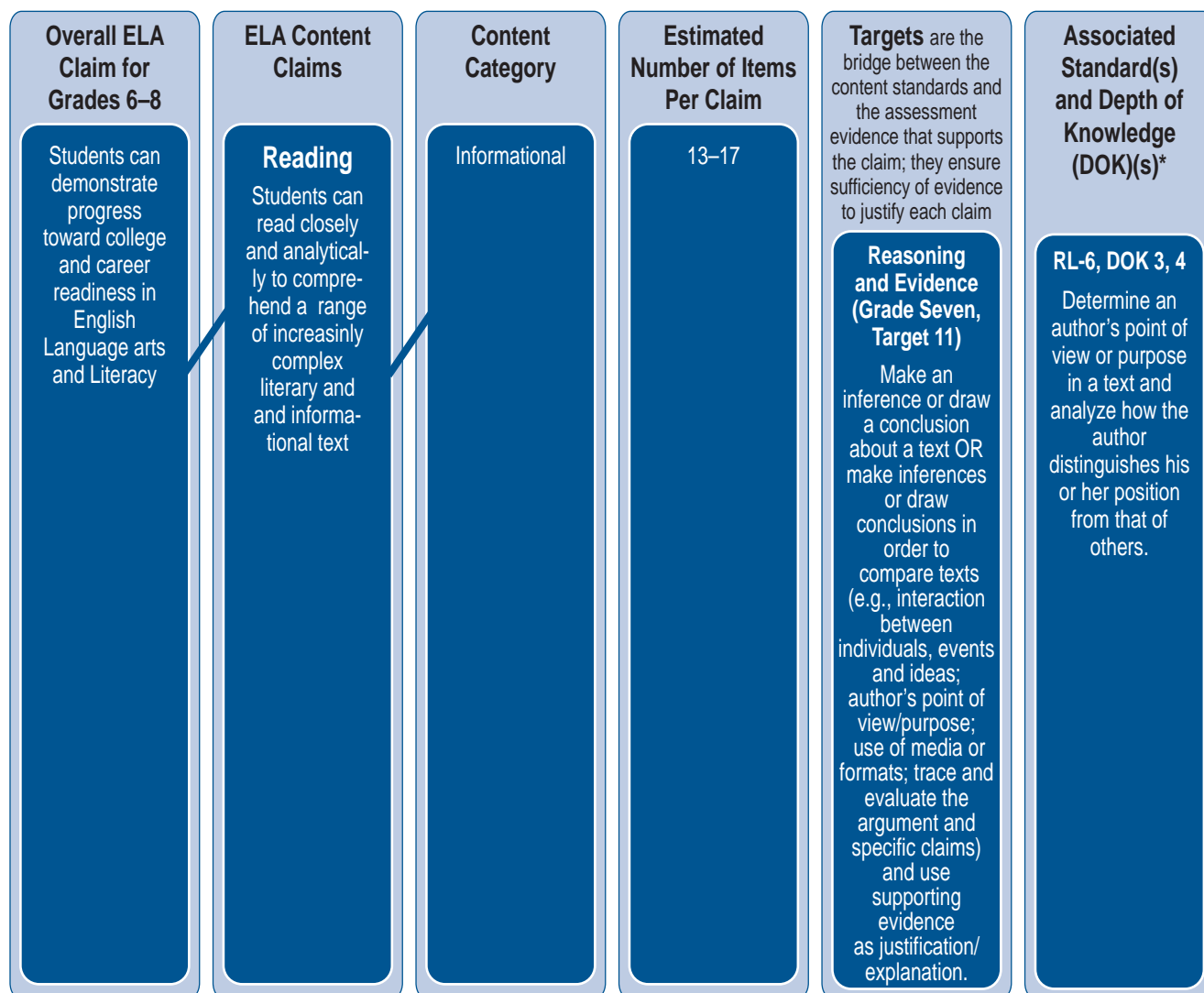


Figure 3a provides a content-specific example of the hierarchy of item development and illustrates how the domain overall claims, sub-domain assessment claims, assessment targets, and standards are connected, both in test development and reporting of scores. Recognizing the hierarchy makes the analysis of Smarter Balanced results easier to understand and emphasizes the importance of using the different levels of scores as contributors to a much larger picture.

**Figure 3a. Anatomy of a Test—The Hierarchy of the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment**  
**Example – English Language Arts—Grade Seven**



\* The Common Core State Standards require high-level cognitive demand. The Depth of Knowledge (DOK) refers to the cognitive rigor required of students to answer a question or perform a task. Four levels of DOK are considered in Smarter Balanced assessments, with each level requiring greater cognitive demand.

## Connecting the Smarter Balanced English Language Arts/Literacy Assessments to Classroom Learning

By examining the item specifications for Reading, Claim 1 (See Figure 4), teachers will be able to connect the evidence required in a Smarter Balanced assessment to learning goals and success criteria for a classroom learning event aligned to particular standards. The Smarter Balanced Item Specifications are a complex but necessary guiding resource as educators begin to analyze results. The specifications are a rich resource of information that include the following:

- Intended claim (of what is being measured)
- Specific CA CCSS standards that are measured
- Types of reading passages used
- Types of items allowed
- Types of accommodations allowed
- Depth of knowledge, and
- Statements of evidence required of students

Often teachers want to know, “How good is good enough?” To give guidance to item writers, Smarter Balanced developed Range Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs) for each grade, claim, and assessment target. These descriptions of what students should be able to do at each level of performance may guide the development of classroom rubrics and operationalize the expectations from the assessments. An example for Reading Literary Text follows:

### The Smarter Connection

What Smarter Balanced resources may a teacher consider in planning learning events for students in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and research?

**Grade Seven Range ALD**

**Claim 1:** Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.

**Target 11: Reasoning & Evidence**—Use supporting evidence to justify interpretations of information presented or how it is integrated (author’s reasoning; interactions among events, concepts, people, or development of ideas).

- Level 1.** Students should be able to use minimal evidence to justify interpretations regarding two or more central ideas and interactions between individuals, events, and ideas.
- Level 2.** Students should be able to demonstrate partial use of supporting evidence to justify interpretations regarding two or more central ideas and interactions between individuals, events, and ideas; and partially trace and evaluate an argument and specific claims to assess whether an argument/reasoning is sound.
- Level 3.** Students should be able to use relevant, supporting evidence to adequately justify interpretations regarding two or more central ideas and interactions between individuals, events, and ideas; and adequately trace and evaluate an argument and specific claims to assess whether an argument/reasoning is sound.
- Level 4.** Students should be able to use strong, supporting evidence to thoroughly justify interpretations regarding two or more central ideas and interactions between individuals, events, and ideas; and thoroughly trace and evaluate an argument and specific claims to assess whether an argument/reasoning is sound.

**Figure 4. Item Specification Reading Claim 1, Target 11, Reasoning and Evidence**

<p><b>Claim 1:</b> Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.</p>	
<p><b>Target 11: Reasoning &amp; Evidence</b>—Make an inference or draw a conclusion about a text OR make inferences or draw conclusions in order to compare texts (e.g., interaction between individuals, events and ideas; author’s point of view/purpose; use of media or formats; trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims) and use supporting evidence as justification/explanation.</p>	
<p><b>Clarifications</b></p>	<p>Items require students to analyze a text (or texts) by making inferences or drawing conclusions about interactions between events, ideas, or individuals; author’s point of view/purpose, etc. Additionally, students will apply reasoning to justify that analysis by identifying supporting evidence within the text(s).</p> <p>All items should require students to cite specific textual evidence to support conclusions drawn from the text(s).</p>
<p><b>Standards</b></p>	<p><b>RI-1</b> <i>Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</i></p> <p><b>RI-3</b> <i>Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text</i> (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).</p> <p><b>RI-6</b> <i>Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.</i></p> <p><b>RH-6</b> <i>Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).</i></p> <p><b>RST-6</b> <i>Analyze the author’s purpose in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment in a text.</i></p> <p><b>RI-7</b> <i>Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium’s portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).</i></p> <p><b>RI-8</b> <i>Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.</i></p> <p><b>RH-8</b> <i>Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.</i></p> <p><b>RST-8</b> <i>Distinguish among facts, reasoned judgment based on research findings, and speculation in a text.</i></p>



<b>Standards (continued)</b>	<p><b>RI-9</b> <i>Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.</i></p> <p>Note: <b><i>Bold Italic</i></b> content (from related CA CCSS) shows what each assessment target could assess.</p>
<b>Depth of Knowledge</b>	DOK 3, 4
<b>Stimuli/ Passages</b>	<p>Each text must include explicitly and implicitly stated details that can be used to make inferences and provide conclusions.</p> <p>Refer to <i>Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: English Language Arts &amp; Literacy Computer Adaptive Test (CAT) and Performance Task (PT) Stimulus Specifications</i> located on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web page at <a href="http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/">http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/</a> under the Item and Task Specification Tab then under ELA Item Specifications for more information on literary text types.</p>
<b>Dual-Text Stimuli</b>	<p>When a dual-text set contains one literary and one informational text, the literary text (text #1) is the primary focus, and the set of items must include items from the literary stimulus as well as items written across both texts. The informational text (text #2) must only be used as a foundational piece for the literary text, and no items can be written for only the informational text. If both texts are literary, items may be written to either or both. All dual-text stimuli sets should contain between 25–40% items written across both texts.</p> <p>When developing items from dual-text, Task Model 5 (short text constructed response-WR) should be written using the <i>Appropriate Stems for Dual-Text Stimuli</i> only to ensure students will have the opportunity to respond in writing to information from both texts. Between 25–40% of all other items written in the dual-text set should be written across both texts.</p> <p>The title of each text should be included in the stem when more than one text is used. Dual-text is considered long text.</p>
<b>Accessibility</b>	<p>Refer to the <i>Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines</i> located on the Smarter Balanced Accessibility and Accommodations Web page at <a href="http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/accessibility-and-accommodations/">http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/accessibility-and-accommodations/</a> under What are Accessibility Resources? for information on accessibility.</p>

<b>Evidence Required</b>	<p>The student will make an inference about an informational text or texts and identify evidence within the text or texts that support that inference.</p> <p>The student will draw a conclusion about an informational text or texts and identify evidence within the text or texts that support that conclusion.</p>
<b>Allowable Item Types</b>	Evidence-based Select Response, two-part multiple choice response (EBSR); Hot Text, select text (ST); Short Text, constructed response (WR)

## Smarter Balanced Assessment Evidence Statements Describe Learning Expectations

The Smarter Balanced assessments are designed to gather evidence from students that show what they know about the standards. To keep the assessment consistent with the standards and classroom learning, teachers have been actively engaged in the review and revision of the evidence statements to accurately describe what performance would

### The Smarter Connection

The evidence statements are directly aligned to the standard(s) being tested. Teachers may consider the evidence statements while planning classroom learning events, as well as success criteria for those events, so the classroom learning and the assessment expectations will be consistent.

meet the standard at a particular grade level. For the purposes of the assessments, the standards are organized into assessment target groups. As illustrated in Figure 3, the assessment targets provide a bridge between the content standards and the evidence that supports the claims.

The Smarter Balanced evidence statements are provided in the Smarter Balanced Item Specifications (Figure 4 provides an example of a grade seven ELA Item Specification) by grade level and content area.

Figure 5 describes how the Smarter Balanced evidence statements may be used in conjunction with classroom evidence to maximize opportunities for demonstrations of student learning.

Figure 6 graphically displays the use of the Item Specifications in helping craft a classroom learning event consistent with the Smarter Balanced evidence statements.

**Figure 5. Suggested Process to Identify Evidence Requirements From the Smarter Balanced Item Specifications**

**Step 1:** Match the ELA Anchor Standard with the Claim and corresponding Target.

**ELA Anchor Standard 3:** Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

**Grade Seven, Claim 1 Reading**

Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.

**Grade Seven, Claim 1, Target 11**

REASONING & EVIDENCE (Informational Text): Make an inference or draw a conclusion about a text OR make inferences or draw conclusions in order to compare texts (e.g., interaction between individuals, events and ideas; author's point of view/purpose; use of media or formats; trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims) and use supporting evidence as justification/explanation.

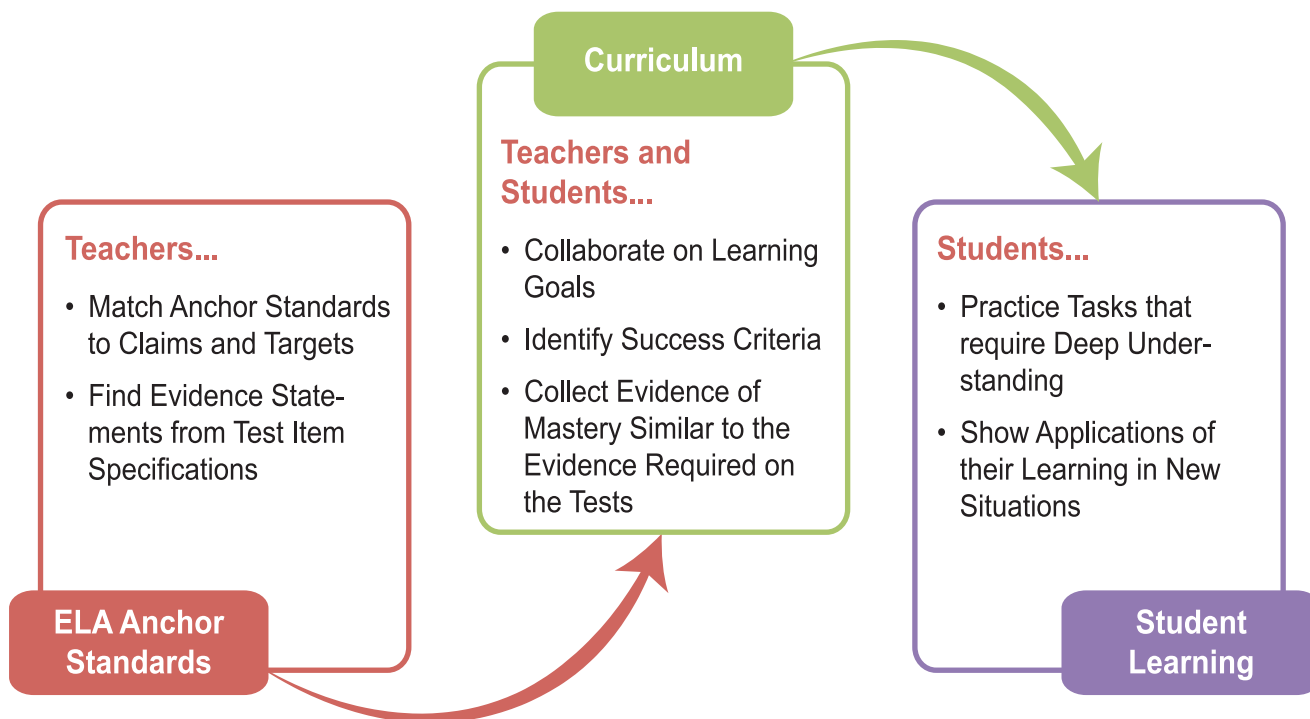
**Step 2:** Find the Evidence Statements used to write items for the test for ELA CAT Item Specifications for Grades Six Through Eight on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web page at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/> under the Item and Task Specification Tab then under ELA Item Specification.

**Statements of Required Evidence:**

1. The student will make an inference about an informational text or texts and identify evidence within the text or texts that support that inference.
2. The student will draw a conclusion about an informational text or texts and identify evidence within the text or texts that support that conclusion.

**Step 3:** Become familiar with the question stems used in developing the items so that students also gain familiarity with the vocabulary (e.g., inference") and phrasing of these stems before the test.

**Figure 6: How to Use the Item Specifications and Evidence Statements to Design a Lesson or Activity**



## Section Three: Instruction with Planned Evidence Collection and Feedback Helps Teachers and Students Improve Student Learning

*How can teachers use the Smarter Balanced Tools to enhance the teaching and learning experience?*

One of the many challenges for teachers in planning effective learning events for students is to know the specific needs of each student. Planned evidence collection during daily instruction using the formative assessment process, after a unit of instruction on a key topic using interim assessments, and at the end of the year with summative assessments provides a balanced view of the student's learning progress. The summative assessments can affirm the evidence collected from other sources in the classroom during the school year.

The *ELA/ELD Framework* emphasizes the integrated nature of ELA and content literacy through reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. No standard or content

### The Smarter Connection

To accurately measure student progress in reading, Smarter Balanced assessments evaluate the student response based on evidence of a deep understanding of the reading standards, not the structure or writing attributes of the student's response. Reading passages meet the grade level quantitative and qualitative standards defined by the *ELA/ELD Framework* and CCSS.

area should be taught in isolation. Students respond to high quality reading texts through speaking and writing.

In contrast, source materials for a writing task are associated with reading levels one grade level below the student's grade level so that barriers to student understanding of the content of the sources are minimized.

Students are evaluated on the organization/purpose, evidence/elaboration, and conventions of their writing. Full descriptions of the source materials and approach to source materials to evaluate reading, writing, listening, and research are provided in the ELA Stimulus Specifications located on the on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web page at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/> under the Item and Task Specification Tab and then under ELA Item Specification.

## Assessment *for* Learning

The exemplar assessment reflects the classroom learning environment and experience of the student and collects evidence that can be interpreted to evaluate the student's level of understanding of the standard being assessed. This is true for classroom assessment as well as large-scale statewide assessment. The *ELA/ELD Framework* distinguishes between assessment **for** learning and assessment **of** learning.<sup>4</sup> An annual **summative** assessment, like the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment, is an assessment *of* learning; while it does not provide teachers with immediate, actionable feedback on student learning, it can provide educators with valuable information to enhance the teaching and learning process, as well as provide a valid and reliable measure of achievement at the student, school, district, and state levels.

In contrast, assessment **for** learning, or **formative** assessment, occurs during instruction, allowing teachers to adapt instruction as needed. The Smarter Balanced Assessment System offers a suite of tools and resources that support classroom-based formative assessment practices. These tools are located on the the Smarter Balanced Digital Library Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/diglib.asp>. The Digital Library has been built by and for educators within the Smarter Balanced Consortium. (All subscribers must provide a user name and password in order to log on to the Digital Library.)

## Steps Toward Creating a More Authentic Assessment

Teachers from Smarter Balanced states, including California, participated in all phases of the test development process to push toward the delivery of an authentic assessment in a statewide system.

As part of the test development process, Smarter Balanced held cognitive labs in participating states (including California). Students were asked to talk about what they were thinking when they answered trial test questions. This way, test developers could determine if the students were actually thinking about what the question writers intended when students answered the question. Using results from the cognitive labs, the student responses confirmed that the sample questions were at the correct level of rigor and deep understanding of the standard being tested. The labs also validated the usefulness of the technology tools for students with special needs, the ability of early elementary students to use the keyboard to write the essay responses, and other critical concerns addressed by the computer-based delivery of the test.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 8 of the 2014 *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework*, which is posted on the CDE's SBE-Adopted *ELA/ELD Framework* Chapters Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/cf/elaeldfrmwrksbeadopted.asp>.



With teacher input, performance assessment tasks and innovative item types were developed that encouraged students to use critical thinking to solve problems. In ELA, the emphasis on research/inquiry signaled the importance of these skills in college- and career-readiness with literacy standards in social studies, science, and career/technical preparation. Research/inquiry moved into the mainstream of classroom learning for ELA and cross-curricular collaborations.

Teachers are able to make use of the Smarter Balanced CAT items and performance tasks presented on the Practice Test to see how the collection of evidence from each question with a reading passage or the questions in a performance task align to the assessment of unique standards. These Practice Tests may be used in a whole group setting, or even used as starting points for creating classroom items or performance tasks. Teachers can gain an understanding of how the combination of evidence adds to the overall evaluation of student understanding of the ELA anchor standards as a whole. With this understanding, teachers may construct their own classroom models for collecting evidence that align pieces of evidence to each standard being assessed.

### The Smarter Connection

Figure 7 provides a side-by-side comparison between the *ELA/ELD Framework* and the elements of the Smarter Balanced test design that support the framework.

**Figure 7. Side by Side Comparison of the *ELA/ELD Framework* and Smarter Balanced Test Design in Grade Seven**

Grade Seven Classroom Learning: Making Meaning	Grade Seven Smarter Balanced Assessments: Making Meaning
New to grades six through eight in the Reading strand, significantly more rigorous concepts of evidence, argumentation, and integration and analysis of multiple sources and perspectives emerge in meaning making.	Test question developers analyze reading passages that are qualitatively and quantitatively appropriate for grade seven students. There is a 45/55 proportion of literary and informational text. Each student reads one long literary passage and several long and short informational passages.
<p>In grade seven, teachers continue to teach and have students practice various reading comprehension strategies to help students make meaning. Teacher think alouds continue to be useful by modeling for students how the teacher sorts through his or her understandings and sources of confusion when reading a text.</p> <p>Students in grade seven are expected to write objective summaries of what they read—a task which becomes more difficult as texts become more complex.</p>	<p>The questions focus on challenging explicit and implicit meanings and the evidence that relates to each. They look for examples of structure and language that contribute to the author's purpose and develop questions around these examples. The four to six questions for each reading passage dig deeper to test the student's understanding and critical thinking.</p> <p>Each student is asked write a short essay to summarize the central idea and supporting evidence of the text or to evaluate the effectiveness of the author's claim and the quality of the supporting evidence.</p>
Writing standards reflect an emphasis on meaning making as students produce clear and coherent texts to convey ideas and information and as they engage in research and demonstrate understanding of the subject under investigation.	The performance task includes a description of the audience and purpose for writing the task as well as informational reading selections for students to learn about the topic. Students analyze the reading selections for the credibility of the sources and the quality of the evidence for the writing task.
<p><i>ELA/ELD Framework</i></p> <p>Chapter 6, pg. 513 Grade six through eight, pg. 582–583, grade seven</p>	<p>Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment Blueprints, ELA, Grades six through eight as of 2/9/2015 can be accessed on the Smarter Balanced Web Development and Design Web page at <a href="http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/">http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/</a> under the Summative Test Blueprints tab.</p>

## Item and Task Types Collect Evidence in New Ways

### The Smarter Connection

The new Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments elicit greater, more precise evidence of a student's knowledge, reasoning, and understanding.

California's previous state tests relied almost exclusively on multiple-choice questions, which are easy to score, but somewhat limited in their ability to assess higher-order thinking skills.

Item types and tasks include, but are not limited to:

- Multi-part questions that require students to use evidence from text
- Constructed-response items, which address skills of greater complexity and require students to demonstrate their thinking
- Technology-enhanced items, which require students to manipulate information
- A performance task (PT), which is an extended activity that measures students' ability to integrate knowledge and skills across multiple standards



### Recommended Resource

All teachers are strongly encouraged to take the Practice Test to become familiar with the types of questions that students will be given on the Smarter Balanced Assessments. The Practice Test is posted on the CAASPP Web Portal at [www.caaspp.org/practice-and-training/index.html](http://www.caaspp.org/practice-and-training/index.html).

## Accessibility Supports and Accommodations Help All Students Meaningfully Participate

The computer-adaptive Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments provide all students with greater flexibility than do traditional pencil-and-paper tests. For example, students can increase the size of an image by using the “Zoom In” option or can highlight key words as they read a passage. Additional options are available to students with special

### The Smarter Connection

The wide array of Smarter Balanced accessibility supports and accommodations make the tests more user friendly and allow students to better demonstrate what they know and are able to do in ELA and mathematics.

needs. The online tools and supports make the assessments accessible to students and ensure that the test results provide a fair and accurate measure of their achievement.

Three major types of supports and accommodations that are available on the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments are as follows:

- Universal tools, such as highlighting, digital notepads, zooming in/out, embedded glossary, writing tools for the ELA full writes, and calculators for some mathematics items—available to all students
- Designated supports, such as color contrast or masking, as well as bilingual glossaries and translated test directions—available to any student who has been identified with a special need, as determined by an educator or support team
- Accommodations, such as text-to-speech, closed captioning and on-screen American Sign Language translation—available to students with an individualized education plan (IEP) or Section 504 plan



### Recommended Resource

For more information, please see the CDE CAASPP Student Accessibility Supports Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/accesssupport.asp>.

## Section Four: Using Smarter Balanced Score Reports to Analyze Data and Improve Learning

The third step in the feedback loop is to analyze the student data trends to evaluate the learning that has occurred by the students. Teachers compare the curriculum intended for learning by students with the curriculum actually learned as evidenced by the results on multiple measures, including the Smarter Balanced assessments. Teachers look at multiple sources of data, including individual results and class data to understand the “big picture” of student learning.

For Smarter Balanced results, each student’s score is placed on a continuous scale that is able to show growth from year to year. With class-level data, teachers may identify strengths and gaps of understanding in the content areas which can lead to adjustments in the teaching and learning cycle.

The Smarter Connection

What do the results on the Smarter Balanced Assessments (summative and interim) indicate about student strengths and needs?

The Smarter Balanced assessments are designed to assess student learning at a point in time, using technology to eliminate accessibility barriers and maximize the opportunity for students to show what they know. The computer adaptive software is a critical design aspect allowing students to answer questions at an appropriate level of difficulty to collect positive evidence of knowledge that leads to an accurate score for each student.

### Computer Adaptive Testing: Appropriate Assessment for Each Student

In computer adaptive testing (CAT), the computer program adjusts the difficulty of questions on the basis of student responses. For example, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a subsequent question that is more challenging, while an incorrect answer will generate a less challenging question. This approach represents a significant improvement over traditional paper-and-pencil assessments, in which all students receive the same test items, and provides teachers and schools with a more accurate way to evaluate student achievement and measure progress over time.

## Practice Tests and Training Tests Available for Teachers, Students, and Parents

Teachers are able to use sample student responses and the Smarter Balanced Practice Test Scoring Guides to find comparisons to student work in their own classes or from

students within the grade span. Once teachers recognize the difficulty and quality of “at standard” and “above standard” responses, they are able to plan learning progressions for students to help them move from “where they are” to “where they need to be” to improve their performance.



### Recommended Resource

For more information, please see the CDE CAASPP Student Accessibility Supports Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/accesssupport.asp>.

**type text of short-to-medium length (for constructed-response items) as well as a full-length essay (for the ELA PT).**

## How Student Performance Is Reported on the Smarter Balanced Assessments

Recall how the Smarter Balance Summative Assessment scores are provided in different grain sizes—that is, different scores provide varying levels of detail that, taken together, can offer a productive way to examine scores. The Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment

is intended to be an accurate measure of student performance at a point in time that is aligned to the state standards. Overall performance on ELA is reported for students and for subgroups of students and provides a general description of achievement. These overall scores are particularly useful in an accountability system and can be helpful in developing the Local Control Accountability Plans required of all California districts. Claim performance may be used to help teachers understand student's strengths and needs as well as the strengths of groups, e.g., all students at a grade level, participants in support programs, and designated subgroups. Following is an explanation of the overall score (ELA) and each content claim score.



### Recommended Resource

For an explanation of the CAT of the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments, view the video *What Is Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT)?* posted on the CAASP Current Administration of the CAASPP System Tests—Training Videos and Resources Web page at <http://www.brainshark.com/ets/vu?pi=zHazElbwozJ0cZz0&intk=189905388>.



## Overall Score and Achievement Level— Shows Student Performance on the Difficulty Scale

Students receive an overall scale score for ELA. The score falls along a continuous vertical scale (from approximately 2,000 to 3,000) that increases across grade levels. Based on this score, a student is determined to be at one of four achievement levels.

Let's consider the ELA scale score range for grade seven, which spans more than five hundred points:

**2,258**  **2,745**

Within that range, there are four distinct achievement levels, as shown in Figure 10:

**Figure 10. Grade Seven ELA Scale Scores and Achievement Levels**

Standard Not Met	Standard Nearly Met	Standard Met	Standard Exceeded
2,258–2,478	2,479–2,551	2,225–2,648	2,649–2,745

The achievement levels take into account the level of difficulty of the test questions. Because the test is computer adaptive, students who consistently answer correctly will be steered toward items at the higher end of the continuum, allowing for the opportunity to achieve at the Standard Exceeded level. Those who consistently answer incorrectly will be steered toward the lower end, possibly resulting in the Standard Not Met level. Regardless of the level, the score provides an accurate reflection of performance against a set of academic standards and performance expectations.

For example, teachers may look at group-level data to observe the trends of students toward each end of the difficulty continuum. If groups of students, on average, have met or exceeded the standards, there is evidence that the classroom learning events helped students practice applying deep understandings of the

### The Smarter Connection

The Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment results help teachers develop lines of inquiry to improve the curriculum, enhance the teaching and learning cycle, and make learning more meaningful to students.



### Recommended Resource

The tables for Smarter Balanced scale score ranges, which include the scale score ranges for ELA and mathematics by content area, grade level, and achievement level, are posted on the CDE's Smarter Balanced Scale Score Ranges Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/sbscalerange.asp>.

standards. If groups of students, on average, have not met or nearly met the standards, then teachers may consider the types of learning events, practice, and opportunities available for students to apply those deep understandings.

### Claim Level Achievement—Shows General Student Performance in Content Areas

The test reports will also highlight a student's performance on each claim for ELA. **A claim is a broad statement that identifies the set of knowledge and skills to be measured on the assessment.** Figure 8 identifies the claims for ELA.

Figure 8. ELA Claim Areas

ELA Areas (Claims) For Grades Six, Seven, and Eight		
	Reading	Demonstrating understanding of literary and nonfiction texts
	Writing	Producing clear and purposeful writing
	Listening	Demonstrating effective communication skills
	Research/Inquiry	Investigating, analyzing and presenting information

Student performance for each claim is reported as **"Above Standard,"** **"Near Standard,"** or **"Below Standard."** These are designed to be **general** indicators of the strengths or needs of the student or a group of students in each claim area. The number of items making



### Recommended Resource

Sample score reports for other grade levels are available on the CDE's CAASPP Student Score Report Information Web page at [www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/caasppssrinfo.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/caasppssrinfo.asp).

up the claim varies based on the specifications of the test blueprint so caution must be used in the interpretations of these claim results. It is recommended that other evidence be considered along with the claim level as decisions are made about curriculum and instruction.





## Use Group-Level Data to Identify Trends in Curriculum Strengths and Gaps

At the end of the school year it is time to take stock of the successes in student learning. The tight alignment of the Smarter Balanced assessments to the *ELA/ELD Framework* makes the assessment results a valuable resource to begin an inquiry, a thoughtful deliberate discussion about how we can maximize the appropriate use of these results. The questions on page 33 can help guide a discussion of what the results show about student and group performance and the implications for building on student strengths and meeting student needs with curriculum resources.

## Assessment Target Reports

Assessment Target Reports are a new resource for administrators and teachers. These reports show the relative performance of groups of students on assessment targets within a claim area. The reports show how a group of students performed on a target compared to the overall performance on the test. ELA is intended to be learned as an integrated content area. Using the formative assessment process, specific evidence for each target may be collected in multiple parts of an integrated task. By reflecting on students' time-on-task and their opportunities for mastery throughout the year in each target area, teachers are able to compare the intended learning of groups of students with the evidence of learning on the Smarter Balanced assessments.

The following chart lists the icons used to show the relative performance of students on the target versus the whole test.

Icon	Target Level	Description
	Better than Performance on the test as a whole	This target is a relative strength. The group of students performed better on items from this target than they did on the rest of the test as a whole.
	Similar to performance on the test as a whole	This target is neither a relative strength nor a relative weakness. The group of students performed about as well on items from this target as they did on the rest of the test as a whole.
	Worse than performance on the test as a whole	This target is a relative weakness. The group of students did not perform as well on items from this target as they did on the rest of the test as a whole.
	Insufficient Information	Not enough information is available to determine whether this target is a relative strength or weakness.

The Assessment Target Report is generated for groups of students and is not available for individual students. Assessment targets for which there are at least 10 items available in the Smarter Balanced item pool are included on the Assessment Target Report.

These Assessment Target Reports may help validate other evidence of deep understanding collected during classroom instruction. A data-inquiry process using this target group-level data can be helpful at the classroom level, grade level, school level and districtwide to understand the successes and needs of students. Remember that these target results are relative to the total test score; therefore, recognizing the overall achievement level will be important in considering instructional strategies that address strengths or weaknesses.

## Guiding Questions to Analyze Group-Level Data<sup>5</sup>

- What is the trend for this group of students related to being “on track” for college readiness? (Overall scores)
- What is the range of overall performance for my class or other groups of students? (Overall scores)
- Which claims appear to be areas of strength for my students? (Claim Achievement Levels)
- Which claims might be areas of need? (Claim Achievement Levels)
- Which targets show a variance from the whole test performance? (Assessment Target Report)
- Which curriculum resources might help me address student needs for the coming year? (Curriculum Resources)
- How do I find examples of student work that meet the goals for being “on track” for college readiness? (Practice Test Scoring Guides)
- What evidence do I need during classroom instruction to know that my students are making progress toward meeting the learning goals for each claim? (Evidence Statements from Item Specifications)
- Where might I find examples of evidence to meet the learning expectations for each claim? (Item Specifications and Practice Test Scoring Guides)
- How can I help my students gain familiarity with the types of questions that they will encounter on the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments? (Item Specifications: See Appropriate Stems for Writing Items for a Target, Practice Test)
- How might I use the Smarter Balanced resources (Item Specifications, Achievement Level Descriptors, etc.) to increase my students’ awareness of performance expectations?

<sup>5</sup> Planning Curriculum for My Students Using Smarter Balanced Score Reports and Resources (2015), located on the Smarter Balanced Digital Library Web page at <https://www.smarterbalancedlibrary.org/content/planning-curriculum-my-students-using-smarter-balanced-score-reports-and-resources>.

## Section Five: Conclusion—Putting It All Together

As teachers build their understanding of the intent of the standards and the relative quality of the evidence of student understanding, they increase their capacity to make adjustments in daily classroom learning events to help students move forward to meet and exceed expectations.

### Smarter Balanced Resources for Teachers from the Smarter Balanced Digital Library<sup>6</sup>

#### The Smarter Connection

Teachers can have confidence in the reliability of the information from the Smarter Balanced assessments because of the tight alignment of the design of the assessments to the *ELA/ELD Framework* and the customization of each student's test to get the best evidence from each student for the most accurate score.

Smarter Balanced is an assessment **system**

designed to support teachers and students in learning. The assessment resources complement the content standards and the instructional guidance that is provided in the *ELA/ELD Framework*. The Smarter Balanced test development resources, practice test scoring guides, and the different kinds of achievement level descriptors illustrate the thinking behind the assessment questions and the rationale for correct answers. The Smarter Balanced Digital Library has resources crafted by teachers, for teachers to share within the Smarter Balanced community. Below are two examples of what is contained in the Digital Library.

- Assessment Literacy Module: Understanding the Learner  
<https://www.smarterbalancedlibrary.org/content/understanding-learner>
- Assessment Literacy Module: Students as Partners in Their Own Learning—  
Grades 1 . FG  
<https://www.smarterbalancedlibrary.org/content/students-partners-their-own-learning-grades-1-FG>

### Formative Assessment Process

Teaching includes the formative assessment process with rigorous tasks. Lessons with formative assessments clarify the student learning goals and success criteria and elicit

<sup>6</sup> To access the links for these resources, the user must be logged into the Smarter Balanced Digital Library.

evidence of student understanding. As teachers interpret this evidence, instruction may be adjusted to optimize learning. Learning is accomplished when students demonstrate and apply the knowledge and skills of the standards. Students take an active role in their learning by using rubrics for self-assessment and peer assessment. Students collaborate with teachers to plan next steps to move up the learning progression and apply what they know to new situations to solve real-world problems.

Using the formative assessment process in conjunction with the Smarter Balanced resources, tools, and results, can maximize the use of assessments and assessment data in the teaching and learning cycle.

Below are additional Smarter Balanced resources that can support and enhance teaching and learning.

### Digital Library

- Assessment Literacy Module: Understanding the Formative Assessment Process  
<https://www.smarterbalancedlibrary.org/content/understanding-formative-assessment-process>
- Assessment Literacy Module: Understanding ELA Content Specifications  
<https://www.smarterbalancedlibrary.org/content/understanding-smarter-balanced-elaliteracy-content-specifications>

### Smarter Balanced Web Site

- *ELA Content Specifications for the Summative Assessment of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Appendix B: Grade Level Tables for All Claims and Assessment Targets and Item Types*

Located on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/> under the Content Specifications tab

- *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: English Language Arts & Literacy Computer Adaptive Test (CAT) and Performance Task (PT) Stimulus Specifications*

Located on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web page at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/> under the Item and Tasks Specifications tab then under ELA Item Specification.



- *Smarter Balanced Scoring Guide for Grades 3, 6, and 11: English/Language Arts Performance Task Full-Write Baseline Sets*

Located on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web page at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/> under the Item and Task Specifications Tab then under ELA Item Specification

- *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Guidelines for Accessibility for English Language Learners*

Located on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web page at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/> under the Item and Task Specifications Tab then under ELA Item Specification

- *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Signing Guidelines*

Located on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web page at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/> under the Item and Task Specifications Tab then under Guidelines

- *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Tactile Accessibility Guidelines*

Located on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web page at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/> under the Item and Task Specifications Tab then under Guidelines

- *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines*

Located on the Smarter Balanced Development and Design Web page at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/development/> under the Item and Task Specifications Tab then under Guidelines

### Council for the Great City Schools Web Site

- Two ELA videos

Located on the Council of Great City Schools Common Core Works Web page at <http://cgcs.org/Page/344>.

### Common Core State Standards Web Site

- ELA Learning Progressions/Introduction to the ELA Common Core Standards—Key Design Consideration

Located on the Common Core English Language Arts Standards Web page at <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/introduction/key-design-consideration/>

**WestEd Web Site**

- Understanding Proficiency

Located on the WestEd Understanding Proficiency Web page at  
<http://understandingproficiency.wested.org>

- Raising the Bar on Instruction

Located on the WestEd Research-based tools, resources, and services Web page at  
<http://raisingthebar.wested.org>

**California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP)**

- Information about the CAASPP System of assessments is available at  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/>
- Access to the Formative Assessment in Action Video Series is available at  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/diglib.asp>
- The Digital Library Professional Development Series is available at  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/instructlearning.asp>